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P.S.M.

With reference to telex message no. C30 from the Ambassador in London, a copy of which I sent to you yesterday, the Minister will wish to consider, before he confirms his acceptance of the invitation from the organisers of "A Sense of Ireland" to attend the opening night of "The Playboy" in London, the question which his presence in London raises of contact with the British Foreign Secretary and/or the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It is recommended that the Minister should at this stage only accept the "Playboy" invitation in principle.

We of course agree that, as the Ambassador has said, such contact at least on a courtesy call basis would be normal.

At the present stage however when the Government's policy on Northern Ireland and Anglo-Irish relations generally is under review, substantive discussions with either Lord Carrington or Mr. Atkins would not be appropriate. At the best, arrangement of such talks should be delayed until policy has been established. The question of having them on 4 March or thereabouts is one which the Minister would wish to discuss with his colleagues in Government.

The British Ambassador mentioned during a call on the Secretary yesterday the question of a possible visit to Dublin by Mr. Atkins. He said that his own thinking in the matter was that a date towards the end of February or at the beginning of March might be appropriate. He also suggested that Mr. Kenneth Stowe (Permanent Secretary in the Northern Ireland Office) possibly accompanied by another official might visit the Secretary in Dublin possibly about 21 February. These proposed contacts will have to be considered in the same context as those which the Minister might have in London. Decisions about them will have to be made in function of clarification of our policy on Northern Ireland. (The Secretary replying to Ambassador Haydon mentioned the impending absence of the Minister and himself in Africa, the Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheis and

the Budget on 27 February, he conveyed the idea that in the light of this calendar and the slow rhythm of meetings scheduled for the conference in Belfast (4, 5, 15 and 27 February) it might be better to put off a decision about a date for either contact proposed by the British until mid-February.)

The British Ambassador's suggestion about a visit to Dublin by Atkins is of some interest because of Atkins's continued involvement in the conference with Northern Ireland party leaders. The Secretary of State in this connection is reported to have given an assurance to Paisley that he would not consult with the Government during the duration of the conference.

It would seem appropriate that in regard to possible meetings both in Dublin and London we should not confirm any arrangement until policy has been clarified. This will presumably be the case by the time the Taoiseach addresses the Ard-Fheis on 15 February.

D.M. Neligan

31 January 1980